

Gives Opening Statement in Congressional Hearing on BP Oil Spill
June 10, 2010

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, U.S. Congressman Charlie Melancon (LA-03) worked to bring attention to the health effects of the BP oil spill on Louisianians during a Congressional hearing entitled, “The BP Oil Spill: Human Exposure and Environmental Fate.” During a hearing held by the Energy and Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, Congressman Melancon gave an opening statement that focused on the longterm physical and mental health effects of the disaster.

“I remain concerned about the physical and mental health of the workers, volunteers and residents of Louisiana’s Third District,” said Congressman Melancon. **“I believe no one knows for certain the long-term health effects that face the people of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, and I worry about these people every day. We need to protect them at all costs and ensure that their health remains a top priority even after the leak is stopped.”**

Congressman Melancon has worked to bring federal attention to the health needs of Louisianians impacted by the oil leak in the Gulf. He pushed the federal government to deploy a mobile health care clinic to Venice, La, to treat and screen workers and residents affected by the BP oil leak in the Gulf. The clinic arrived May 31st, following requests from Congressman Melancon to both [the President](#) and the [Secretary of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#).

Congressman Melancon has also asked the federal government for assistance in establishing [temporary mental health services](#) to help residents cope with the BP oil disaster in the Gulf. Congressman Melancon has hosted two recent town hall meetings in south Louisiana where he has heard from residents who are starting to display symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Below is Congressman Melancon’s statement, as prepared for delivery.

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for holding this hearing today and for starting the discussion on what impact this environmental catastrophe is having and will have on the residents of the Gulf Coast, including the families I represent in the third district of Louisiana.

I’d like to thank all of the witnesses for coming today, but I’d like to give a special thanks to Dr. Trapido from New Orleans for participating today.

I remain concerned about the physical and mental health of the workers, volunteers and residents of Louisiana’s third district. I believe no one knows for certain the long-term health effects that face the people of Louisiana and the Gulf Coast, and I worry about these people every day. We need to protect them at all costs and ensure that their health remains a top priority even after the leak is stopped.

We have learned from Katrina that the end of the immediate disaster doesn't mean the end of the response. Respiratory problems linked to formaldehyde in trailers and mental health issues that still linger in our communities are constant reminders that the unanticipated impacts of a disaster may last for years – or decades – to come.

In disaster response, the best way forward isn't always black and white, so we should be erring on the side of caution and taking every opportunity to make certain that the health and safety of the Gulf Coast residents is a priority.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Congressman Melancon has been leading efforts in Louisiana to coordinate the private, federal, state, and local response to the oil leak caused by the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil platform on April 20th. He represents in Congress the areas of coastal Louisiana most directly affected by the oil leak, including Plaquemines, St. Bernard, Terrebonne, Lafourche and southern Jefferson Parishes. The Deepwater Horizon platform was located 50 miles off the coast of Louisiana's Third Congressional District.

Congressman Melancon has been an advocate for Louisiana's fishermen and seafood industry impacted by the oil spill in the Gulf. Congressman Melancon secured a fisheries disaster declaration from the federal government less than a month after his [first request](#), paving the way for financial assistance for Louisiana fishermen and small business owners.

Congressman Melancon also worked to get additional protective boom to the Gulf Coast via military transport plane. In his conversations in early May with local fishermen and parish officials involved in laying the boom, Congressman Melancon learned they were facing a severe shortage in boom material, hindering their ability to protect the coast. In response, Congressman Melancon [sent a letter to President Barack Obama](#) requesting military aircraft be used to help bring protective boom to the Gulf Coast more quickly. Within a few days, the President granted his request and the first Air Force aircraft arrived in Belle Chasse with additional boom.

As the representative of coastal parishes in Louisiana most affected by the oil spill, Congressman Melancon has worked to connect residents with information and assistance from the state and federal government, BP, and private relief efforts. Congressman Melancon held town hall meetings on the Gulf oil disaster on May 7th in [Chalmette, Louisiana](#), and on May 22nd in [Houma, Louisiana](#).

. Congressman Melancon invited representatives from the Coast Guard, BP, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Small Business Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other state and local agencies to answer questions and listen to concerns.

Congressman Melancon has been working closely with parish and federal officials to monitor response efforts and provide assistance where needed. On April 29th, as the oil leak disaster worsened, Congressman Melancon traveled to Venice, LA, in Plaquemines Parish to meet with

Coast Guard officials and Parish President Billy Nungesser and evaluate response needs.

The following week, Melancon [toured by boat](#) the coastal marshes in St. Bernard Parish with parish officials and viewed the efforts of local fishermen to deploy boom.

Following his town hall in Houma, Congressman Melancon toured the coast along [Terrebonne, Lafourche, Jefferson, and Plaquemines Parishes](#) by helicopter with U.S. Coast Guard Captain Edwin Stanton, the Federal Coordinating Officer for the disaster at the time. He has also met with Terrebonne Parish President Michel Claudet and Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph to discuss their disaster response needs.

In late May, Congressman Melancon toured the marsh along [Jefferson, Lafourche, and Plaquemines Parishes by boat](#) with Jean Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner to view the boom laying efforts. He also met with Plaquemines Parish Sheriff Jiff Hingle and visited Buras talk to workers involved in the oil leak containment and cleanup operations.

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